Review

Reviewed Work: *Glosae super Platonem* by Guillaume de Conches, ed. Édouard Jeauneau

Review by: Jean Trouillard

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Translator's note: No Greek appears in this review. It does, however, quote one sentence of medieval Latin (Guillaume de Conches's own words, being reviewed) —Latin is reproduced in full below alongside a literal, word-for-word English translation, distinct from the smoother translation of Trouillard's surrounding French.

GUILLAUME DE CONCHES, *GLOSAE SUPER PLATONEM*, CRITICAL TEXT WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND TABLES, BY ÉDOUARD JEAUNEAU. Paris: Vrin, 1965, octavo, 358 pp.

If the reader's eyes are at first unhappily struck by the minuscule type and an overly compact text, the inner eye is quickly won over by Édouard Jeauneau's agile thought and firm method. In fifty pages of introduction, he manages to present us — with an erudition so well mastered that it seems to flow naturally — the figure of Guillaume de Conches, his milieu, his work, his *Glosses on the Timaeus*, the method and plan of this work, the commentators from whom he draws his inspiration, his stance toward Plato, and finally the destiny of this Chartrian Platonism, forerunner of the Florentine Platonism of the Renaissance. There follows a detailed description of the manuscripts used in this edition (happily illustrated with photographic plates), a justification of the order of preference adopted by the editor, and finally a bibliography of the editions of Guillaume, which will be supplemented at the end of the volume by a further bibliography of ancient texts and modern studies likely to shed light on the subject. In the edition of the *Glosses* itself, one will appreciate the meticulousness and abundance of the critical apparatus, as well as the clarity of the divisions.

The work bears as its epigraph Guillaume's own phrase: *Nos Platonem diligentes* [We who love/cherish Plato]. One senses that Édouard Jeauneau himself takes no merely antiquarian interest in Chartrian Platonism, and that this sympathy has not merely sustained him over the course of this arduous labor. It has given him that measure of complicity without which the editor of a philosophical text risks stopping short at the secondary structures of thought. For us, it furnishes the first modern edition of a work without which we cannot reconstruct the path taken by medieval Platonism.

Édouard Jeauneau holds that these *Glosses* belong, along with the *Dragmaticon*, to Guillaume's mature works, and that they were composed around the middle of the twelfth century. They allow us to grasp how the *lectio* was practiced, and what teaching was like in that period. They reveal a master in full command of his powers, steeped in Boethius, from

whom he draws his inspiration especially on matters of mathematics, and familiar with Macrobius, to whom he turns for cosmography. From Chalcidius he borrows the Latin translation of the *Timaeus* and the doctrine of prime matter.

The 'gloss' as practiced by Guillaume is a complex exercise — more literal, but no less systematic, than the 'commentary.' It follows an invariably identical scheme. It requires that the glossator become not only a theologian, a mathematician, a naturalist, but also a dialectician and a grammarian. It obliges him to interpret the myths, or *integumenta* [veils, wrappings]. It is by this procedure that Guillaume will seek to resolve the divergences he perceives between the *Timaeus* and Christian doctrine.

For example, Plato writes that the Demiurge distributed souls equal in number to the stars (41d). But Scripture teaches, according to Guillaume, that God creates new souls every day. The Chartrian then writes:

> **Latin:** *Si quis tamen non verba tantum, sed sensum Platonis cognoscat, non tantum non inveniet heresim, sed profundissimam philosophiam integumentis verborum tectam.*
>
> **Literal:** *If someone, however, comes to know not the words only, but the sense of Plato, he will not only not find heresy, but [will find] the most profound philosophy, covered [concealed] by the integuments of the words.*

Indeed, he continues, what is at issue here is not creation, but an attribution whereby each soul receives from its star the number of days it must spend within its body.

> 'Plato intended that souls be placed within the stars, not in a local mode, but in a causal mode, and that the stars be the vehicles of the soul, because, under the influence of the stars, the body becomes fit to receive the soul created within it.'

One will note the interpretation Guillaume proposes of the famous *dii deorum* [gods of gods] with which the Demiurge's address to the young gods opens (41a). The stars, he says, are called 'gods of gods' because they govern the elements, which are themselves called 'gods.' This exegesis is close to the more general interpretation advanced by Proclus, under the influence of Syrianus, in *In Timaeum*, ed. Diehl, III, 204.

The Latin translation by Chalcidius on which Guillaume comments ends at 53c.

Jean Trouillard